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ABSTRACT

Studies of the history of newspapers in the United States have virtually ignored the ethnically oriented, foreign language press. This gap in journalistic investigation should be filled by considering the two conflicting roles which ethnic newspapers fill: assimilation of the ethnic group into the mainstream of American culture and maintenance and reinforcement of the readership ethnicity. By realizing that America is not completely successful as either a melting pot or a land of genuine cultural pluralism, the scholar of journalistic traditions can understand the needs of ethnics who support the contunuance of ethnic newspapers. Newspapers for ethnics are similar to their English counterparts in their coverage of the news but differ in their closer ties to the communities that they serve. The ethnic press tends to supplement the news in other major newspapers, but it provides a touch with the ethnic's, and especially the immigrant's, "old country" in his own language as other newspapers cannot. The evolutionary nature, the relationship to the dominant press, and the expression of distinct cultural, social, and political values must be considered in studies of the ethnic press. (CH)



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America's Enduring Ethnic Press

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August, 1973

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A paper presented to the History Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Fort Collins, Colorado, August 21, 1973.



Current research shows that ethnicity is a more important and durable factor in American life, values, political motives and associational patterns than usually has been acknowledged. Several studies in sociology, anthropology, political science and history conducted in the 1950's and 1960's suggest new perspectives for viewing the immigrant experience in America. Central to these studies is the view that ethnicity takes on altered form as an ethnic group absorbs the American experience, but for many groups ethnic associations and traditions still form the basis of their identities and attitudes.²

The old way of looking at immigrants was to consider that all would be absorbed in the American core culture. This just didn't happen; nor were ethnic groups separate but equal as other theories proposed. The core culture continued to absorb more and more Americans as they shed ethnic identity, but in every ethnic group there were still some who retained ethnic allegiance. Ethnicity and Americanization, then, both describe the American experience. The challenge for scholars lies in re-examining the experience of ethnic groups in a manner that illuminates both of these factors and considers the variations within and among groups, in order to appraise this little-explored factor of ethnicity in American cultural, social and political life.

The foreign-language (immigrant or ethnic) press offers a unique perspective on these political, social and cultural values of ethnic groups. It also offers opportunities to break fresh ground in journalism history. The lack of attention paid to the immigrant press by media historians of the past does mean that the new methodology in mass commun-



ications, sociology and anthropology, for example, plus the recognition of ethnicity in American culture can be applied to studies of the ethnic press.

Any scholar who embarks on ethnic press research will have to deal with the history of the ethnic group as well as existing generalizations about immigrants and their cultural institutions. This paper will review the central observations that have been made about the foreign-language press and suggest an approach for future research using examples drawn from the author's study of the Danish-language press in America. 3

Immigration Ideologies

Three ideologies or attitudes have characterized the research on America's 41 million post-Civil War immigrants. These are: Anglo-Conformity, Melting Pot and Cultural Pluralism. The best and most concise analysis of them is presented by sociologist Milton Gordon.⁴

Anglo-Conformity covers a variety of viewpoints about assimilation and acculturation, all having as a goal the desirability of maintaining dominant English institutions and cultural patterns, according to Gordon. This view reached its "fullest expression" during World War I and its postwar period when foreigners and aliens were pressured in print, in person and by the government to demonstrate their loyalty and Americanized character. 5

The Melting Pot image has been one of the most popular. It pictures all the alien strains going into the bubbling pot and emerging as new Americans. The proportions that go into the mix are not discussed. As Che balance shifted and immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe

outnumbered those from Northern Europe, the pot seemed to cool. It appeared "unable" to absorb such different elements as Italians, Russians, Slavs and Jews, for example. Orientals and blacks were rarely, if ever, associated with this concept.

Cultural Pluralism arose in the early twentieth century as an intellectual response to the nativists' pressures to speed up the process of Americanizing the aliens and discourage others from coming. Scholars and social workers viewed ethnic cultures and associations as positive compributions to American culture that ought to survive in a pluralistic sector in which all groups were equally valued and distinct.

As Gordon and others have suggested, these views do not describe contemporary America. Several new terms have been coined: Multiple Melting Pot, Triple Melting Pot, Structural Pluralism. What these scholars see is an overarching acculturation (behavioral assimilation) to some degree for all groups along with varying amounts for each group of structural assimilation (entry of immigrants into American social cliques, organizations, institutional activities, civic lives and intermarriage).

While Nathan Glazer saw major groupings developing along religious and racial lines -- Protestant (white and black), Catholic and Jewish, Gordon said that it was not that clear cut. Some of the older immigration groups have tended to come together, and Catholics are in the process of doing so, but the process is by no means complete. "Racial and quasi-racial groups such as Negroes, Indians, Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans still retain separate sociological structures," declared Gordon. "The outcome of all this in contemporary American life is plural-



4.

ism, Gordon maintained. 7

The reason structural assimilation has not occurred any more than it has, said Gordon, is that white Protestant America, despite its Melting Pot and Anglo-Conformity ideals, does not actually extend the same invitations to all groups to enter the core structure. Ethnic groups and racial groups are then thrown back on their own to form workable subcultures to achieve their social and political ends. Their newspapers and publications are chief instruments for sharing ethnic values and uniting the community.

Duality of Ethnic Press

The foreign-language press can be "both brake and accelerator" in the process of Americanization, concluded Robert E. Park, in his <u>The Foreign-Language Press in America</u>, part of the series conducted by sociologists at the University of Chicago in the 1920's. Park supported a gradual Americanization of the immigrants, and his analysis of the foreign-language press is colored by his Anglo-Conformity beliefs. Park set the terms of the discussion about the foreign-language newspapers in America; his phrase is one of the most repeated statements about the immigrant press. Park's use of the value-laden terms "brake and accelerator" indicate his bias, but the duality he correctly saw might have been termed the assimilation and ethnicity functions of the ethnic press.

The fear of disloyal foreign-language papers was strong during the World War I years and some histories written during the period reflect this attitude of fear or distrust; others attempt to justify the immigrants' loyalty. The period was one that resulted in licensing of all foreign-language newspapers during the war and in bans against foreign languages

in some states.¹⁰ Later the government announced that nearly all the ethnic press had been loyal during the war and had served as the one means of reaching many non-English speaking citizens with vital information.¹¹

Park was generous in his praise of many of the language group papers he surveyed in his study of 848 weeklies and 140 dailies (4-6 million total circulation). The foreign-language press could be an important aid in Americanization, he said, because it provided the immigrant with useful information on American laws and politics and encouraged his naturalization as a citizen. 12

Still, while it was psychologically satisfying to read in one's native language, Park maintained that this also "fostered nationalism and helped turn the lonely wanderer's thoughts back to his native land."13 The foreign-language press, the ethnic church and the hational societies help preserve the racial languages and keep the immigrant in touch with political struggles at home and center his interests and activities in Europe and keep him apart from American life, Park warned.14

Park's observations applied to some of the foreign-language groups at the time more than to others, and because his generalizations are based on the assumption that Americanization (structural assimilation) is the desired and obtainable goal for America, they get in the way of an objective appraisal of the ethnic press's role in American life.

The immigrant press tended to move toward the American type, or the commercial paper, Park theorized. Carl F. Wittke's studies of the German-American papers confirmed this for the German-American urban dailies,



which adopted the sensationalist techniques of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst of the late nineteenth century and abandoned that "personal journalism" to become more commercially oriented along with the rest of the American press. 16

Danish-language weeklies also followed their American-language counterparts and switched from broad news and political discussion to localized or ethnic community news, although this does not really make such papers "commercial," as Morris Janowitz explained. Such papers have strong ties to the community values and their editors weigh the interests of the community against solely commercial opportunities and choose the course of action that will insure harmony in the community even at the expense of turning down a quick but limited profit. 17

Immigrants' settlement patterns were also linked to their newspapers' content, in Park's theories. The urban papers contained more about politics, more national, international and home country news because the immigrant's life in the city destroyed his provincialism, said Park. These people related more to their nationality than to the provinces they came from. Rural papers, he believed, tended to focus on provincial news and idealized pictures of life in the old country. These newspapers preserved memories of the immigrants and fostered sentimental views of that life, since rural life emphasized the provinces over the nationality in Park's estimation. 18

Park's analysis does not hold for the Danish-American weeklies, where the rural weeklies retained a broader outlook and coverage of national news longer than the urban weeklies, which more quickly became supplemental, community papers.

Park has proposed several theories about the foreign-language press and about the general American press, but the author's study of a century of Danish-American press history suggests that Park should be subjected to re-examination. While his ideas might have held for particular papers at a particular time, they are not all flexible enough to be used to analyze the entire press history of an ethnic group. His theories may be "time-bound" to the 1920's. At least they need to be tested against urban and rural press histories of old and new immigrant groups.

Historians of immigration, Marcus Lee Hansen, Carl F. Wittke and Oscar Handlin, commented further on the duality of the ethnic press, but their views tended to stress the value of this press and other immigrant cultural institutions in easing the immigrant's adjustment to the new life. Their central observations of the immigrant press are excerpted below:

Reading a foreign-language newspaper was a step in the Americanization of the immigrant. It helped him interpret the issues and events of the day and provided him with the information he needed to operate in the community and the larger society he had entered. At the same time the immigrant press provided the most sensitive mirror of what went on in the immigrants minds. 19

-Handlin (1951)

Through the newspaper the immigrant could also keep in contact with the country and people he had left and could contact people in America sharing that same experience. In this way the press helped lessen the shock of moving from one culture to another.²⁰

-Wittke (1957)

The gradual process of the immigrant's Americanization can be traced by the lengthening columns of American news, particularly the space devoted to the activities and interests of the immigrant group in the United States.

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-Hansen (1940)



Ethnicity and Survival

The death of the ethnic press has been predicted many times. Park saw the foreign-language press as a "phenomenon of immigration" and predicted that without immigration the press would die in a few years. "It is fed by new arrivals and its existence depends largely upon immigration policy," he declared in 1925.²²

The Immigration Quota Acts of the 1920's did curtail immigration, but the ethnic press did not die. It was considerably reduced in numbers and circulation. The 1920's and the 1930's took a heavy toll. As recently as 1970, however, there were still 440 such publications in 38 languages and with a reported circulation of two million (down from a peak of 4-6 million in World War I).²³ Although new arrivals continued to add to the staying power of the foreign-language press, they do not account entirely for the continued presence of the ethnic papers. Some immigrants, despite learning English, becoming citizens and feeling Americanized, still hold their immigrant newspaper subscriptions because these papers cater to their interests in group affairs in America and in the former homeland.

This ethnic persistence was examined by linguist Joshua Fishman in his book, <u>Language Loyalty in the United States</u>. He concluded that the ethnic newspaper's potential role is "de-ethnicized ethnicity" -- continuing to exist and yet not exist, to be needed and yet be unimportant, to be different and yet to be the same, to be integrated and yet to be separate. "24

Even the "old immigration" groups such as the Scandinavians and Germans, which by the 1960's had produced large numbers of third-generation ifspring, still had an ethnic press, Fishman said, and the Lutheran

Synods with their reinforcement of ethnic identification were largely responsible. Many of these papers are published all or in part in English, especially among Scandinavian groups, and Fishman predicted that these would not serve to hold the readers who were linguistically assimilated.

"The ethnic newspaper's major advantage is its ethnic distinctiveness," he warned, and the more general and less ethnic it becomes the
more it may lose readers to American publications. The surviving ethnic
papers might decrease their emphasis on the mother-country and focus on
the group in the United States, Fishman predicted, but many editors he
talked with were ambivalent over ethnic goals and efforts to maintain the
language.²⁵

This evolutionary tendency of the ethnic urban press has also been discussed by sociologist Morris Janowitz. "As ethnic communities in the cities declined with the move to the suburbs," he said, "the ethnic paper shifted to assume the character of a regional and national ethnic paper and moved from local news and gossip to national ethnic policies." 26

Studies of the immigrant press remain largely untouched by these new ideas, since very little work has been done by historians or journalists in the last few decades. Two recent studies of the Norwegian-American press, however, have made excellent use of political voting records that reinforce findings of a majority of radical-progressive political editorials in these Wisconsin and North Dakota immigrant newspapers of the late nineteenth century.²⁷



In beginning a study of the ethnic press of one group, the researcher often must sift through all the general histories, biographies and essays on the group in question in order to build a framework for understanding the group experience in America and also in order to compile a list of publications and editors. The remainder of the work will be done in archives, perusing individual publications and collections of letters and personal papers (if the researcher is fortunate). Many ethnic groups have no central historical archive or collection, so that state and local historical societies, public libraries, colleges, churches and organizations must be contacted to determine what is available. This problem alone has discouraged some researchers.

In some cases there are articles and books on the group's press history, and in a few cases there have been content analysis and audience surveys. 28 Carl F. Wittke's The German-Language Press in America is still the major work in immigrant press history for the press of a single group. It describes the experience of the largest foreign language press group in America. 29 A recent doctoral dissertation used this approach for the Yiddish press.

What has been done tends to support the view that the general thrust of the foreign-language press has been to aid the immigrants' assimilation, as shown by an emphasis on American topics and the Americanization of the content and the narrowing interests of the group in their local affairs. The fact of the foreign-language newspapers' continued existence, however, demonstrates the tenacity of ethnicity.



A Functional-Cultural Approach

The foreign-language press is evolutionary, responding to the changing needs of its audience and to outside influences. Earlier analyses of the immigrant press have failed to take into account that immigrant groups are in different stages of accomodation and assimilation at any given time and that different purposes and obstacles for each group shape its needs and in turn its press. Studies of the ethnic press must consider the immigrant group's experience and characteristics, the time period, the functions of the press, and parallel developments in the American press. The following functional-cultural analysis may be useful: 31

1-Surveillance of the environment. Collecting useful information for the immigrant in the new society.

2-Correlation of the parts of society. Mediating between the two cultures by interpreting the immigrant's role to him.

3-Transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next.

Passing on the old culture or the American ethnic group identity.

4-Entertainment. Amusing without regard to particular effect.

5-Assimilation-ethnicity experience of the ethnic group. Analysis of the factors that aid or hinder assimilation and stimulate or decrease ethnicity of the group over time.

6-American press history. Trends for the period of study compared to ethnic press developments.

The above six criteria can be applied to the foreign-language press at any stage, regardless of how the researcher interprets Americanizationethnicity issue. Applied to the Danish-American press, it brought the



following results:

Surveillance and correlation functions were strongest until the turn of the century. The period was one when the immigrant group was largest and most in need of information and understanding about America. The seven leading Danish-American papers had a combined circulation of 72,000.

The World War I period and the 1920's brought a crisis in understanding between immigrant groups and native Americans over loyalty of the foreign born, and the 1930's depression brought a further crisis for the press as circulation declined to about half and expenses rose rapidly. Editors attempted to reach an indifferent second generation that by that time outnumbered the foreign born with English language and youth columns. Transmission of social heritage began to dominate the columns of these papers.

The entertainment function declined in this period as it did in the American rural weeklies. Stories, features and poetry, were replaced with more local and personal news. Studies of the Danish-language press that covered just this period might well conclude that the papers were then "a drag on assimilation" because of the ethnic emphasis in the content and the repeated discussions over what to do about the loss of ethnic identity. 32

Transmission of the heritage remains the central function of the Danish-American papers today, but the heritage is Danish-American, not Danish. The view of Denmark presented in this ethnic weekly press is the managementalized and far removed from contemporary Denmark's social welfare democracy. The two remaining Danish-American papers have a combined

weekly circulation of about 7,000 and confine themselves mainly to the news of the few remaining Danish communities, secular and religious organizations and long columns of personal notes about birthdays, anniversaries, deaths, visits and vacation trips.

On the other hand the newspapers of some ethnic groups are still in a period of growth. The 1970 figures indicate that Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Chinese and Japanese have a growing ethnic press. The Mexican-Americans and Puerto Ricans, of course, add to the growth of the Spanish-language press. Post-World War II European refugees, many of whom have an active political interest in events of their homelands, help sustain the activity in the Slavic and Baltic ethnic press. Factors such as a crisis or war in the homeland, news not well covered by the dominant American press, the cohesiveness of the group, its religious unity and prejudice or resistance from the American core society all seem to contribute to the longevity of a group's ethnic press. Recently "cause" papers within the Chicano, Native American and Black groups have been founded as radical alternatives to the existing publications of these groups. 33

Variety in the Ethnic Press

The study of the Danish foreign-language press in America suggests that the immigrant press is much more varied and interesting than has been believed. The Danes, who never comprised more than one per cent of the total population in America, produced nearly 200 of their own publications -- general newspapers, ethnic community papers, partisan organs, religious publications, farmers' magazines, women's magazines, humor and literary



or trines.

These papers changed as the needs of the group changed but the broad outlines of these changes also bear some striking resemblances to what was happening in the general press. The ethnic press cannot be studied apart from the developments in the general American press or from the assimilation experience of each group, and studies of the editorials, for example, need to be correlated with the voting behavior or political opinions of the audience. As an index to the group's Americanization, or ethnicity, a study of the editorials alone might give a distorted picture, depending on the dates of the study. The Danish-American editorials, for example, suggest a strong emphasis on American national and world politics throughout the century, even at a time when the rest of the content of the papers was increasingly focused on Danish-American community affairs.

The Danish-American newspapers began in the 1870's and 1880's with strong editorial policies and religious or political beliefs personified by individualistic editors; the papers ended as ethnic community papers, serving small Danish-American enclaves as bulletin-boards. Today the two remaining papers are non-political, non-controversial and aimed at a small ethnic interest group--about one-tenth of the Danish mother tongue speakers in 1960 compared to one-third of them in 1910.

The Danish-American press for the most part has aided the Danish immigrants assimilation, although it has also promoted spiritual and emotional ties with the homeland. Today that emphasis is on tourism, whereas during the world wars the plight of Denmark was often featured. Americanization and ethnicity both described the Danish-American press history, but Americanization has been the stronger force. The audience

for Danish-American newspapers today is thought to be well beyond middles

age, similar to that found in studies of the Swedish-American press. 34

. Research Directions

Lack of interest, absence of foreign-language reading ability and the scattered nature of the source materials may account for the media historian's avoidance of this branch of the American press. Sociologists, historians and linguists have contributed most of the research in this field thus far.

Media historians would add to the field their understanding of the cultural, political and institutional role of the press and could begin to pinpoint the role of the ethnic press in America's urban and rural society, as well as the role of editors as opinion leaders and gatekeepers. Such studies would add to our knowledge of the flow of news and opinion between the ethnic press and the general American press. They would also throw needed light on the persistence and/or evolution of ethnic values and their role in the political and cultural debate.

Although immigrant historians generally credit the sharp circulation decline of the ethnic press in the 1920's and 1930's to the decreased immigration, nativist hysteria of the World War I period and Americanization of the immigrants, journalistic studies might show that economic factors (rising costs in newsprint and labor) and rapidly increasing competition from radio and the expansion of the daily newspaper delivery into the rural areas of America in the 1920's also may have been important, at least to the rural foreign-language press. The period is one in which American weeklies swiffered heavily from such factors and is one of rapid newspaper consolidation of dailies in urban areas. ²⁵



The current revival of interest by third and fourth generation ethnic-Americans in their ethnic heritage poses one further challenge to the ethnic press. Will it adapt to include the new potential audience or not? The third generation interest in ethnic roots has been discussed by researchers but only briefly. The existence of foreign-language papers to serve the transient Greek, Yugoslav and Turkish laborers in modern Berlin, West Germany, Denmark and Sweden, poses another challenging area for cross-cultural and trans-oceanic studies of the ethnic press.

Perhaps the best way to study the foreign-language press in the United States (or elsewhere) is to look at its duality as a description of the two broad functions it serves -- assimilation and ethnicity -- and to focus on its evolutionary nature, its relationship to the dominant popular press, and its expression of cultural, social and political values. Broad surveys of language-group publications and focused studies of content during specific critical or normative periods must be done, however, before the history of America's immigrant press can be written.





MOTES

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⁴Milton Gordon, "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," in <u>The Ethnic Factor in American Politics</u>, by Hawkins and Lorinskas, pp. 24-44.

5Gordon, Theory, p. 26.

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²⁹Wittke (see note 15).

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32Sture Lindmark, <u>Swedish America</u> 1914-1932 (Uppsala; Laromedsforlagen, 1971).

33Granitsas, Ethnic, p. 12.

34Studies that deal with the age of the audience include those by Schersten and Soltes (see note 26) and a recent survey of the Swedish-American press by the Swedish Foreign Ministry, Utvandrarnas tidningar (Stockholm: Utriksdepartement, 1971). The latter found that the nine remaining Swedish-American newspapers had a paid circulation of 25,000 combined and served first-generation immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1929. The study predicted that this audience would remain until 1975.

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